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NATIONAL INDICATIONS CENTER

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Room 1 E 821
Pentagon

12 July 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR CHAIRMAN, WATCH COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: Czech-Soviet Confrontation

Information received since our meeting on Wednesday, 10 July, suggests to us that the situation in Czechoslovakia is moving rapidly toward a decisive stage, probably in the next few days. Our information does not permit a determination of which side will concede, or how much, in the interests of avoiding a head-on clash, but unless some concessions are forthcoming from the Czechs, there appears to be no slackening off of the increase in Soviet military capabilities within Czechoslovakia to react decisively with or without engagement of the recently introduced forces. The attached summary of events incorporates some of the reasoning behind our views.

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As stated above

Director

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DIA review(s) completed.

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POSSIBLE EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA OVER THE NEXT 48 HOURS

1. Indications are that the situation in Czechoslovakia is rapidly approaching a critical stage. The USSR has markedly stepped up its pressures on the Dubcek regime, and some move to halt the trend toward liberalization and/or to restore the conservatives to power is likely in the near future. It is most unlikely that the Soviet forces are going to withdraw from Czechoslovakia until there is some change in the internal situation acceptable to the USSR. It may be that the Czechoslovak leaders, threatened by possible Soviet military action, have seen the handwriting on the wall and have already or will make concessions to the Soviets in the near future. If they have not or do not, we believe the indications are mounting that there will be some type of Soviet-backed power play against them in the next few days.

2. The Soviet decision--reached about 6 May--to introduce forces into Czechoslovakia was probably intended to forestall the type of situation which developed in Hungary in 1956--where the situation was already out of control and the Soviets had to bring in massive military force to suppress a popular rebellion. Next to maintaining control of Czechoslovakia, the USSR probably most desires TO AVOID ANOTHER HUNGARY which so blackened the Soviet image abroad and complicated its problems in Eastern Europe.

3. The happiest solution in Czechoslovakia from the Soviet standpoint of course would be for the present leaders in Czechoslovakia to see the error of their ways, particularly now that Soviet troops are there, and take measures to halt the trend to liberalization, renew press censorship, etc. The second best solution for the USSR would be a quiet internal coup by the conservatives, backed of course by the Soviets but without any overt participation whatever by Soviet forces. Whether either of these can be accomplished is uncertain.

4. Another potential course for the USSR is to have its forces in position to support a carefully timed takeover by conservative elements in the party and the army or for the conservative elements to appeal openly to the USSR for assistance. The USSR has now had two months in which to make its political and military moves for such action if this is its plan. Even if this is to be the course of action, however, the USSR probably hopes to use a minimum of force and to have its units stationed in advance at critical points throughout the country so as to neutralize any move by the opposition, including any Czechoslovak military elements who might be so rash as to consider opposition to the Soviet Army.

5. The announcement that Soviet forces will begin withdrawing from Czechoslovakia on 13 July could be a cover for the redeployment of the Soviet troops from training areas and assembly points to crucial locations in preparation for a conservative coup,

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probably within the following 24 hours, that is on Sunday. It may be of interest that the USSR traditionally has chosen the early hours of Sunday morning for moves of this type-- the counterattack in Hungary on 4 November 1956, the closure of the sector borders in Berlin on 13 August 1961, the Soviet-planned North Korean attack on South Korea on 25 June 1950. This is not to suggest that the element of surprise alone would dictate the timing, since the requirement to complete all preparations is more essential.

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